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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2724
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5822
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 8571
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4466
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0596
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2257
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 5091
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001210

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL
NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: RTG TALKS WITH INSURGENTS
STALLED, BUT IN "A GOOD SPOT"

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 47 (SAMAK BLESSES BUT DOES NOT
EMBRACE PROCESS)
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 00040 (PEACE DIALOGUE AWAITS SIGNAL
FROM NEW GOVERNMENT)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 00909 (SAMAK MISSPEAKS)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 00710 (PRISONER ABUSE ALLEGATIONS
REPORTEDLY ON THE RISE IN SOUTHERN
THAILAND)
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 00628 (STATISTICS SUGGEST MILITANTS ARE
GETTING MORE SOPHISTICATED)
[1](#)F. 07 BANGKOK 06281 (SOUTHERN DIALOGUE FACILITATOR
GIVES OPTIMISTIC READ-OUT OF BAHRAIN

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TALKS)

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: A Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) representative, Michael Vatikiotis, told the Ambassador in mid-April that secret talks between the RTG and southern insurgents were stalled and would likely remain so for four to six months. HDC, which is brokering talks between insurgents and the government, believes there is little political will in Bangkok to advance the peace process. HDC's representative is concerned the insurgents will grow impatient and commit some larger act of violence to regain the spotlight. We do not expect to see any near term dramatic movement by the Thai government on reconciliation, but Vatikiotis cited some positive steps by officials based in the South. It remains unclear whether Prime Minister Samak will view the situation in the South as amenable to a political solution, rather than a strictly military one. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Michael Vatikiotis from the Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue provided the Ambassador with an update April 10 on the status of the secret dialogue between the Thai government and southern Thai insurgents. According to Vatikiotis, the latest round of talks, held in Jakarta on March 27 and 28, went as well as could be expected given the current political dynamics in Bangkok. National Security

Council Secretary Lt. General Siripong Boonpat led the negotiating team. He said the atmosphere during the discussion was good. For the first time HDC formally notified the Indonesian Foreign Ministry that talks between the Thai government and southern Thai insurgents were being held in Indonesia. Indonesian officials appeared to welcome this news.

13. (S/NF) Vatikiotis told us the RTG originally called the meeting to explain to the insurgents why there has been no progress on confidence building measures since December. The RTG negotiators blamed political chaos and uncertainty in Bangkok, and informed the insurgents that it was unlikely that the senior Thai political leadership would unveil new initiatives in the talks in the next four to six months. Vatikiotis explained that the insurgent leaders are under pressure from their constituents to demonstrate the value of a dialogue with the government. Supporters of the insurgents want to know why their leadership is having a dialogue when they are seeing no results, particularly given the risk of exposing themselves to the government. Vatikiotis believes the BRN-C (one of the major insurgent groups) is willing to accept some form of autonomy rather than independence, but it will want concessions from the RTG in return. (Vatikiotis said he felt the RTG was indeed engaging useful interlocutors on the insurgent side, claiming that the BRN-C representatives and those from PULO -- another major insurgent group -- do have meaningful authority.)

14. (S/NF) For now, according to Vatikiotis, the focus of the talks is how to maintain this delicate peace process. He characterized the process as "a mess," because the government has no sense of direction. He believed there would be no decisions regarding any process of reconciliation for at least the next four to six months; the RTG has not yet fulfilled the commitment of former Prime Minister Surayud

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Chulanont to release some prisoners. Vatikiotis worried that the insurgent groups would launch one or more dramatic attacks in order to prompt the RTG to address their concerns. He said it was up to the government to make something happen.

15. (S/NF) Vatikiotis said there have been some positive developments in the South recently, despite the stalled talks. Independent religious leaders have told him that the government made an effort to reach out to them in the last month. These religious leaders believe they are central to a solution to the conflict. Vatikiotis also said that the Southern Border Province Administration Center (SBPAC) is beginning to understand that it needs to work with sub-district level leaders, whom it believes might be part of the insurgency. SBPAC officials are beginning to see that they need to work with these people instead of simply arresting or killing them.

16. (S/NF) Vatikiotis explained that the RTG committee charged with advancing the dialogue includes a senior MFA official, Royal Thai Army Commander-in-Chief General Anupong Paojinda, and the Secretary General of the NSC. Vatikiotis said newly-appointed NSC Secretary General Lt. General Surapol Phuan-aiyka -- who replaces Siripong, the lead RTG negotiator in Jakarta -- would not be as supportive of the peace process as his predecessor. Vatikiotis said former Prime Minister Surayud's reinstatement as a member of the Privy Council could help the peace process, but Surayud's ability to influence events was questionable because the Privy Council has no formal role in the talks since the NSC Secretary General is the designated chairman of the committee overseeing the process. Nevertheless, Vatikiotis believed one of Surayud's advisors, Mark Tamthai, Director of Payap University's Institute of Religion, Culture and Peace, could regain influence over the process (see ref A).

17. (S/NF) Turning briefly to the role other countries might

play in the process, Vatikiotis said the process works best if the Thais see it as an internal effort. Acknowledging a possible future need for other countries to exert greater pressure on the RTG, Vatikiotis nevertheless believed that in current conditions foreign pressure would be counterproductive.

¶18. (S/NF) Vatikiotis told us the next round of talks will be held sometime in May, possibly in Nepal. He believed the Nepalese peace process may hold some lessons for the both government and the insurgents. He dismissed the Aceh peace process as a potential model because, he said, many Indonesians feel they were forced by the international community to sign an agreement.

¶19. (S/NF) Concluding, Vatikiotis told us that, although the RTG and the insurgents were still far from any kind of agreement, they left the talks in "a good spot." He was unsure how to move forward with the process given the lack of political will in Bangkok, but he assessed the atmosphere at the Jakarta talks was constructive. Vatikiotis said he would try to find a way to keep the two sides engaged while they wait for political will to build in Bangkok.

¶10. (S/NF) Comment: Vatikiotis was ambivalent in his assessment of the latest round of peace talks; he characterized the talks as stalled, but with good atmospherics at the last session. He was hopeful that the RTG will eventually try to move the peace process forward. We share his concern that the insurgents will not wait patiently for the government to decide what it wants to do, and commit some significant act of violence to draw attention to the situation. One of the key questions that remains unanswered is whether Prime Minister Samak will view the situation in the South as amenable to a political solution, rather than a strictly military one.
JOHN